

Book on trade tokens offers 11,000 entries

By Roger Boye

When Ore H. Vacketta began collecting more than 30 years ago, bus tokens were his "first love."

Acquiring such tokens was a natural extension of Vacketta's work as a director of the American Transit Corp. in downstate Westville. But that hobby gradually gave way to what has become an even greater thrill, studying trade tokens issued early in this century by Illinois merchants.

Fortunately for other hobbyists, Vacketta has parlayed his expertise into a 580-page book, "Trade Tokens of Illinois." The second edition, published a few weeks ago, is destined to win fame as the standard reference.

"It took me 10 years to compile that second edition," the 69-year-old Vacketta said. "It was fascinating work, because trade tokens are a rich, original source of Illinois history; every little town had its store."

Many of the state's "ghost towns" live today through their trade tokens. Merchants used such items to pay farmers for produce, extend credit or advertise their businesses. The merchants usually issued metal tokens in values ranging from five cents to \$1 in trade.

As Vacketta explained, collecting trade tokens is an ideal pastime for the hobbyist with a low budget. The values for most Illinois specimens range from 20 cents to \$10, with just a few pieces costing more than \$20.

Vacketta based the first edition of his book on his own collection, which in 1973 numbered about 5,000 pieces. He acquired many of them by attending flea markets and garage sales near his home in Vermilion County.

Vacketta's second edition has 11,000 entries and lists several thousand Chicago tokens. Vacketta attributes the increase in part to the many collectors who sent him information after they read his first book.

He also garnered the cooperation of several nationally known numismatists, including hobby publisher Clifford Mishler and token expert Ben Odesser of Skokie, who have essays in the second edition. The hardbound book also includes 800 photographs.

But most of the credit goes to Vacketta, who catalogued the 11,000 items alphabetically by town and estimated the relative scarcity for each piece. The job represents nearly a lifetime of work.

Vacketta's book is available from World Exonumia, the publisher, at P.O. Box 4143, Rockford 61110. Copies also are on sale at some coin stores. The cost is \$31.45, which includes Illinois sales tax.